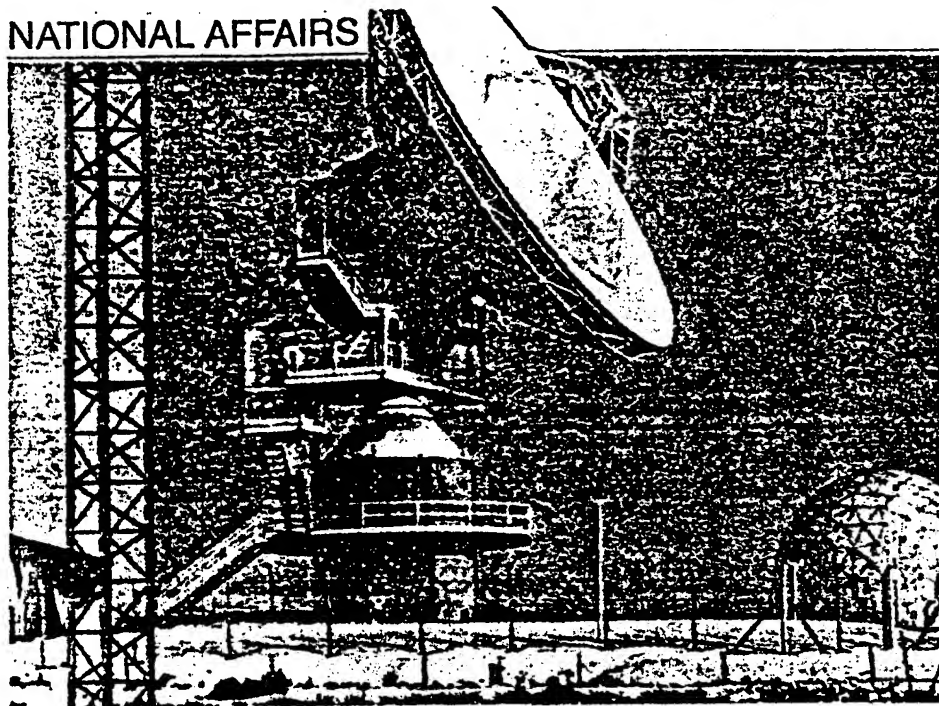


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NATIONAL AFFAIRS



NSA installation at Yorkshire, England: A sprawling network of listening posts, satellites, computers and antennas

Unveiling the Secret NSA

Judging by the sheer size of his operation, America's most important intelligence officer is an Air Force lieutenant general named Lincoln Faurer, the director of the National Security Agency. It is Faurer's NSA—not the CIA—which owns and operates the bulk of U.S. intelligence-collection systems: everything from "aquacade" satellites in orbit 22,000 miles above the Indian Ocean to massive "antenna farms" cached in the West Virginia hills. The global communications the NSA intercepts and decodes give the government its single most important source of intelligence. NEWSWEEK has learned, for example, that during the Falklands war, the NSA broke the Argentine code—allowing crucial information to be passed to the British about the disposition of Argentine forces.

For all its influence, NSA remains the least known of the intelligence agencies. For most Americans, the National Security Agency does not exist—or is fuzzily confused with the National Security Council. That is exactly the way NSA wants it, since success in eavesdropping depends on the target's naive belief that no one is listening. But that is about to change with the publication this month of a new book, "The Puzzle Palace," by Massachusetts lawyer James Bamford.* Bamford, 35, unveils in eye-glazing detail the organization and installations of "America's most secret agency"—a worldwide network of satellites, listening posts, computers and antennas that can, Bamford implies, home in on virtually every international telex, telegram and telephone conversation.

Knowledgeable sources say Bamford's tome is chockablock with errors that will no doubt allow NSA to denounce it as "grossly distorted" or "wildly exaggerated." But Bamford has nevertheless painted a fascinating picture of the massive agency that commands the largest share of the secret U.S. intelligence budget, will soon have more floor space at its Fort Meade, Md., headquarters complex than any U.S. agen-

A new book tells how America's largest and most clandestine intelligence agency spies on the world.

cy save the Pentagon, and churns out 40 tons of classified documents a day.

Although he doesn't mention it in his book, Bamford once worked as a clerk for the naval security group, which operates many of NSA's listening posts, and also served as an informant for the Senate Intelligence Committee during its investigation of eavesdropping on Americans. He insists that nothing in his book came from his own association with NSA and that none of it is classified. But the government belatedly has reclassified some of the information and the Justice Department has warned Bamford "not to publish or communicate the information" which it says was mistakenly re-

cannot reclassify documents, but a new executive order, which took effect Aug. 1, claims the government can do just that. The debate is not an idle one. The maximum penalty for publishing classified information about communications intelligence is a \$10,000 fine and 10 years in prison.

Careless: Classified or not, Bamford found much of his information gathering dust on library shelves. As he tells it, his first break came when he was going through papers at the George C. Marshall Research Foundation in Lexington, Va., and came across a copy of an unclassified NSA newsletter for "NSA employees and their families." Bamford successfully argued that if NSA relatives could read the newsletters, so could he—"I'm as good as somebody's cousin," he says—and the agency allowed him to pore through more than 6,000 pages of newsletters dating back to 1952. Although sensitive information had supposedly been deleted, the censors had been careless. Names that were blacked out in headlines appeared unmasked in the body of the story and bits of seemingly harmless information led him to major discoveries. An obituary of one NSA employee, for instance, noted that he had once been stationed in Yakima, Wash.—alerting Bamford to the existence of an NSA listening complex tucked away in the vastness of an Army firing range. When his relations with NSA eventually soured, Bamford turned to other sources. He scoured more government archives and talked to several former NSA officials, including former director Lt. Gen. Marshall Carter.

Bamford's book details for the first time the physical layout and organization of the massive NSA complex at Fort Meade. The